

# ***Success Story***

**RICHMOND DISTRICT OFFICE**

Ronald E. Bew, District Director

---

**Release Date:** March 11, 2009

**Contact:** Dawn DiBenedetto (804) 771-2400

## **SBDC Assistance and Dedication Lead to Grave Success**



The journey to entrepreneurship for Mr. James T. Jefferson started behind a backhoe, laboring at opening and closing the final earthly resting places of community folks. He was hired mostly by local funeral homes. Honesty and hard work were his guiding ethics 16 years ago when he started on this journey as well as now as President of Southside Grave & Vault/Newsom Monument Company located at 3447 Wilkerson Road, Skipwith, Virginia 23968 (rural Mecklenburg County).

Newsom Monument Co is located at 15450 Highway 47, Chase City, Virginia.

“We, my wife Willie Anna and I, started part-time and grew the business, one customer at a time” reflects Mr. Jefferson. Customer care and service are the fundamental tools for their success and the company sought referrals from each completed job. Before long their customer list stretched to over thirty funeral homes in Southside Va. and North Carolina. In late 1999 he landed a Trigard burial vault franchise in Mecklenburg County Va. Trigard is one of the four major brands of concrete burial vaults. Mr. Jefferson currently installs the vaults he manufacture in ninety eight percent of the graves he opens and close as well as providing vault services to other areas

An opportunity to purchase Newsom Monument Company surfaced in 2006 and Mr. Jefferson first sought help from the Longwood SBDC South Boston branch and was furthered assisted by Southside Business Technology Center. Longwood SBDC in coordination with federal, state, local and private-sector resources and through a cooperative agreement with SBA provides business counseling assistance. Their business clients in turn, promote economic development in local communities like Chase City and Mecklenburg County. Businesses served include Southside Grave & Vault Co.

employing ten individuals. SBDCs meet the counseling and training needs of 650,000 start-ups or existing business clients annually. Based on the client needs, SBDC's tailor their services to meet the evolving needs of the small business community.

South Boston Branch of Longwood Small Business Development Center first provided one-on-one counseling to Southside Grave & Vault Company in 2003 addressing concerns like reducing expenses such as escalating fuel costs, establishing a variety of suppliers and writing its business plan. This had to be done in a slowing economy while being sensitive to keeping costs down whenever possible. Ways to demonstrate how profitability can be improved were put down on paper. Through the assistance provided in the business plan, Southside Grave and Vault Company became interested in acquiring Newsom Monument Company in a neighboring town of Chase City. This business was purchased in 2007.



Southside Grave & Vault, Inc/Newsom Monument Company is a candidate for 2009 Minority Small Business Champion of the Year. It is a Trigard franchise dealer, one of the four major brands of burial vaults, serving a 100 mile radius. The businesses currently employ ten.

Through planning initiatives, counseling, implementation, and despite hard times, Mr. Jefferson forecast is blossoming. "We obtain as much business as our current resources allow." Southside Grave & Vault Company/Newsom Monument Company continues to build relationships with new customers and other suppliers and the Longwood Small Business Development Company. James and Willie Anna Jefferson have volunteered from time to time to be speakers at "How to Start a Small Business" seminars sharing their first hand experience. Mincing no words, his list is short: "Do your homework. Know your service. Know how to reach the customer. And, very important, know your competition." This list has paved the journey to success for Southside Grave & Vault Company.

###